

Categorical Exclusion Form

Project: Round Spring Cavern Gate Replacement

PIN: 24607

Date: March 5, 2009

Describe project, including location (reference the attached Environmental Screening Form, if appropriate), and list any mitigations:

Project Description: Ozark National Scenic Riverways (OZAR) is home to two species of federally endangered bat: the gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) and Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*). These species use park caves as maternity sites, hibernacula, transient sites, and bachelor colonies. Caves not protected or improperly gated have shown decline populations in bat populations. The purpose of this project is to replace the present gate at Round Spring Cavern with a standard bat gate to meet standards as described by the American Cave Conservation Association (ACCA). Round Spring Cavern is a developed cave within the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. Ranger-led interpretive tours are taken into the cave on a fee basis. Round Spring Cavern has over 6,000 feet of surveyed passages and is the third longest within the Riverways boundaries, but is the longest on NPS fee land. The cave contains valuable and unique mineral, cultural, paleontological, and biological resources. The cave is an important biotic refuge for a variety of salamanders and bats and is a known Gray bat refuge and Indiana bat hibernacula. Construction of a new gate is necessary in order to fully comply with the Endangered Species Act and will improve access by endangered bat species to the cave thus providing additional habitat for them. The present gate is at a narrow section of the cave entrance which constricts the flow of air in and out of the cave. Further, the present gate presents a number of vertical bars which are difficult for bats to maneuver around. Lastly, the narrow gate provides predators, particularly bat predators, with an easy and ideal opportunity to attack and kill prey. This became apparent when 26 Eastern Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus subflavus*) bats were found dead within 5 feet of the gated entrance on August 24, 2008. A Diagnostic Service Case Report from the USGS National Wildlife Health Center determined the deaths were due to thoracic trauma and suggested a small predator with narrow-placed incisors was responsible. A short time after the attack, a black rat snake was discovered perched on the bars of the gate at the main location in which bats are able to fly into and out of the cave, thus confirming the USGS report. Based on current populations of both the Indiana and Gray bats, another attack as stated above could potentially eliminate or greatly reduce their current populations. The Cave Research Foundation (CRF) and its not-for-profit partners will design, fabricate, and install the gate at the entrance of Round Spring Cavern. The gate will prevent unauthorized entry. The layout and construction of the cave fence will be such that: Free Flow of water and air will not be affected; there will be no hindrance of free access to the cave by bats; and unauthorized entry will be precluded. The fence will be constructed using cold-rolled steel (already acquired by NPS), welded together on site. All vertical posts shall be four inch square tubing. The tops of the posts will be pinned to the cave roof. Horizontal members of four inch angle (4"X4"X1/4") will be used for the bulk of the gate. Expanded metal will be installed below the gate footings to prevent digging. One hinged gate door, approximately 3 feet wide and 4.5 feet high, will be constructed with a concealed hinge and protected locking mechanism. CRF will provide professional consultation and design services, limited transportation of steel to the site, fabrication and installation of the gate meeting ACCA standards, and remove construction associated debris from the site. Construction will take place in April or in September in order to avoid wintering bats and summer visitor usage.

Project Locations:

Location

County: Shannon Cty

State: MO

District:

Section:

Geo. Marker:

Other:

(See Attached Environmental Screening Form)

Mitigation(s):

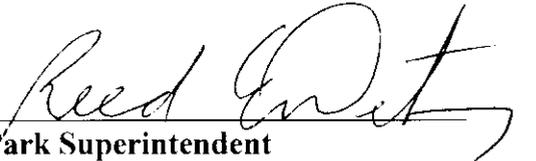
- No mitigations identified

Describe the category used to exclude action from further NEPA analysis and indicate the number of the category (see Section 3-4 of DO-12):

C.8. Replacement in-kind of minor structures and facilities with little or no change in location, capacity, or appearance--for example, comfort stations, pit toilets, fences, kiosks, signs, and campfire circles.

Describe any public or agency involvement effort conducted (reference the attached ESF):
(See Attached Environmental Screening Form)

On the basis of the environmental impact information in the statutory compliance file, with which I am familiar, I am categorically excluding the described project from further NEPA analysis. No exceptional circumstances (e.g. all boxes in the ESF are marked "no") or conditions in Section 3-6 apply, and the action is fully described in Section 3-4 of DO-12.



Park Superintendent

APR 9 2009

Date

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Title

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